

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
4th and Maple Streets  
Niobrara  
Knox County  
Nebraska

HABS No. NE-31

HABS,  
NEB,  
54-NIOB,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NE-31

## ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

- Location: Southeast corner of Fourth Avenue and Maple Street, Niobrara, Knox County, Nebraska.
- USGS Niobrara Quadrangle Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 14.579670.4733650.
- Present Owner: United States of America (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District).
- Present Use: Vacant, scheduled to be moved to the Santee Indian Reservation, 7 miles northeast of Niobrara. (Moved to Santee Indian Reservation in 1977).
- Significance: The Episcopal Church was the third church constructed in Niobrara and the last for a good number of years. The church is significant as an example of rural ecclesiastical architecture with Gothic Revival elements.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: According to Niobrara Pioneer, the excavation of the church was begun on July 12, 1895. The foundation was laid the next day. On October 1, 1895, upon completion of its construction, the church was formally consecrated by the Bishop of Nebraska.
2. Architect: The church was possibly designed by Reuben Cash.
3. Original and subsequent owners: On June 29, 1895, the property on which the church now stands was sold to Mary G. Perry by William and Jenny Cross for \$100. Mrs. Perry was the treasurer of St. Paul's at this time. Later in the year, after construction began, title was transferred over into the church name by Mrs. Perry. The property was held by the church until 1974 when it was sold to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The original and subsequent owners of lot 16, block 3 of Graves Addition to West Niobrara, from the deed records held at the Register of Deeds, Knox County Courthouse in Center, Knox County, Nebraska, are as follows:

- 1881 Deed July 15, 1881, recorded August 6, 1881, Book D, page 345, George Graves and wife to Mortimer Boxington. For numerous properties in West Niobrara including lot 16 for \$56.00.
- 1881 Deed August 4, 1881, recorded August 6, 1881, Book D, page 346, Mortimer Boxington to William Cross. For consideration of \$50 which included lot 16
- 1881 Deed August 17, 1881, recorded September 23, 1881, Book D, page 405, George Graves to Bressler and Patterson. For numerous properties including lot 16 for \$110
- 1882 Quit Claim Deed April 24, 1882, recorded May 4, 1882, Book I, page 509, Bressler and Patterson to George Graves. For consideration of \$25
- 1890 Mortgage November 24, 1890, recorded November 26, 1890, Book Q, page 184, William Cross to Esther A. Harden. For consideration of \$350, plus 10% interest due November 15, 1891 (Release July, 8, 1895, recorded in Book Y, page 594)
- 1892 Deed March 28, 1892, recorded March 4, 1892, Book P, page 38, William Cross to Jenny Cross, wife. For consideration of \$1.00
- 1895 Deed June 29, 1895, recorded July 5, 1895, Book T, page 73, William and Jenny Cross to Mary G. Perry. For consideration of \$100
- 1895 Deed October 5, 1895, recorded October 5, 1895, Book T, page 108, Mary G. Perry to Protestant Episcopal Church
- 1974 Deed May 28, 1974, recorded June 27, 1974, Book 95, page 653, Diocese of Nebraska to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. For consideration of \$13,000
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Reuben Cash and his son were the contractors of the church.
5. Original plan and construction: The Episcopal Congregation, having been organized for over five years, decided to build their own church in 1895. The July 12th, 1895 Niobrara Pioneer described the structure and its setting as follows:

"The building will be a cottage gothic structure 24' x 48' and vestry 16' x 22' with 9 foot posts - it will have a belfry, windows of stained glass, a memorial window, a furnace, and in every way will be handsomely and comfortably furnished. It is located on the corner of the Cross House opposite the residence of Honorable H. E. Bonesteel and sisters, one of the prettiest sites in town."

An old record book for St. Paul's Church provides us with further information on the appearance of this building at the time of its construction.

"The Church has a seated capacity of about 150, with a convenient guild room attached to the rear. This room being of sufficient size, amply provided with chairs, and having an organ included for its own use, will furnish an admirable place for Sunday School, lenten, and other services, as occasion may require . . ."

". . . The little round window of excellent design in the west end of the church is the result of postage stamps gathered carefully from different sources by a few of the ladies of the mission. This window will ever be a monument of what may be accomplished by patient painstaking . . ."

The church cost more than \$2,000 to build.

6. Alterations and additions: Numerous physical evidences suggested that an addition was made to the vestry of the church: varying foundation, a change in floor joists, a seam in floorboards, a break in cornice line, and a sawtooth effect in the wood ceiling cover. This speculation was confirmed by the dimensions reported in the Niobrara Pioneer article dated July 12, 1895 for the vestry area, and further confirmed by a notation signed by Fannie A. Bonesteel and found recorded in the Record Book for St. Paul's Church reading as follows:

"Improvements on St. Paul's Church, Niobrara, Nebraska, during the year 1904. Addition to Guild Room 14' x 16', making the room 36' x 17', built by Mrs. Perry and costing \$280.00."

Many of the stained glass windows have been removed as a result of vandalism. Those portions remaining, however, are thought to be original. Records reflect that the Hauser Art Glass Studios in Winowa, Minnesota, did work on the windows

in the early 1960s. The studio has record of a \$595.00 contract but no record of actual work done. A company representative feels it was most likely repair work since no record was retained and the bill was relatively small.

An old view of the church shows the use of contrasting paints on the exterior. This common Victorian detail has been eliminated (this view appears in the original 1956 Niobrara Centennial -- which is not presently available).

Mr. Clyde Conklin remembers large furnace barrels in the rear of the church and the heating system moved to the half basement between the years 1910 - 1915. Mr. Conklin also feels that most of the interior woodworking was a later addition.

Mrs. Jean Koster, of Norfolk, Nebraska reported that a white picket fence once enclosed the back yard of the church, and Easter egg hunts, among other activities, were held there.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

St. Paul's Episcopal guild had its first meeting on January 17, 1888. Church services for members were held in the First Presbyterian Church in Niobrara. In 1895, money was pledged and under the guidance of Reverend W. H. Sparling, it was decided by the congregation to build their own church.

Since 1888 the church was blessed with a strong congregation until the 1960s - 1970s when the memberships dwindled. Eventually it was taken over by the Indian community in 1977.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Niobrara Public Library Board. Niobrara Centennial, 1856-1956. Niobrara, Nebraska: Niobrara Tribune, June 1956. Photograph, page 49 of original centennial book shows the church painted with contrasting paints, date unknown.

Knox County Pictorial Atlas, 1960, publisher unknown. Picture of church with plaque above the front door.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, Register of Deeds, Center, Knox County, Nebraska.

Interviews:

Telephone interview, August 11, 1977, Hauser Glass Studios, (507-457-3500), Winowa, Minnesota, contract for work on church in 1960s. Learned it was probably repair work and windows appear to be original.

Clyde Conklin, July 12, 1977, born in Niobrara 1898 and member of congregation, information on alterations.

Correspondence:

Mrs. Jean Koster, August 7, 1977, Norfolk, Nebraska. Born in Niobrara and member of congregation, information on general setting.

The Episcopal Church, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Mrs. Ken Olson, transcription of passages located in the old record books held in the South Dakota Diocese of Nebraska, Volume 7, the Reverend Canon Whitmarsh, Editor, Episcopal Rooms, Omaha, Nebraska. Dates are June 15, 1895 and October 27, 1895.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Niobrara Bicentennial Committee. Niobrara Centennial 1856-1956 (updated 1976). Niobrara, Nebraska: Verdigre Eagle, 1976.

Niobrara Pioneer. Newspaper articles, July 12, 1895, July 26, 1895, November 1, 1895, July 24, 1903.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Typical of many ecclesiastical structures built in the newly settled areas of the Midwest, the church has a simple gable roof, basic rectangular plan and Gothic interior elements. A more elaborate exterior detailing is seen with the use of patterned imbricated shingles at the second and third stages of the bell tower and on the gable ends suggesting shingle style influences.

2. Condition of fabric: The church is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The T-shaped church measures 24' x 64' with a nave, 24' x 48' and a sacristy, 16' x 37'. The front of the church has two bays, while the side and rear walls have five and four bays respectively. The church is a one-story structure with a half basement.
2. Foundations: The church sits on stone and cement foundation.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The lower portion of the church is covered with white painted clapboarding approximately six inches in width. The upper portion (gable and tower areas) has decorative imbricated wood shingles.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood frame construction supports the church.
5. Chimneys: A newer brick chimney is found at the center of the east gable and projects approximately three feet above the peak of the roof.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front (west) elevation has arched double doors. Each door has four panels with surrounding moldings. The doorway is surrounded by a six-inch unadorned border with a narrow arched strip as a final decorative trim. Single doors on the north and east sides of the church are also four-panel doors, and are the only exterior openings with a square treatment.
  - b. Windows: A triple arched stained glass window and large two foot oculus, centered in the gable, dominate the front facade (oculus no longer has glazing; possibly and most likely, stained glass originally).

Four evenly spaced, single arched stained glass windows run along the north and south elevations; five single arched clear paned windows light the sacristy; two narrow arched stained glass windows light the small vestibule. All windows have similar decorative treatment: slightly inset, heavy unadorned arched moldings with thin drip molding trim surrounds, simple sills. Louvered openings on the bell tower are slightly more elaborate. These openings are flanked by attached wooden pilasters and based with a simple carved scroll design.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The simple wood shingled, flared gable roof intersects the flared hipped roof of the rear sacristy area.
- b. Cornice and eaves: A gradual flare of the roof ends creates an eaves extension of approximately six to twelve inches. An unadorned eaves boards runs below the eaves.
- c. Bell tower, roof ornament: A three-stage bell tower in which the front entrance is housed sets off diagonally from the northwest corner of the building. Decorative imbricated shingling, used on the second and third (conical roof) stages as well as on the gable ends, visually distinguishes an upper and lower division of the building. The first and second stage of the tower is defined by the shingling detail and slight flare at the base of the second stage. The third stage (the roof of the tower) has a more dramatic flare extending severely from a steep conical spire to create an approximate twelve inch overhang. A sturdy wooden latin cross with trefoil ends stands on a metal flashing base at the peak of the spire.

An interesting detail of note is a carved wood ornamental block approximately eight inches high, standing on the north side of the rear hipped roof at the joining of the three planes. This peculiar detail has carved corners in a somewhat gothic fashion, a simple cross and side notches. No evidence of a matching ornament could be found on the opposite end.

C. Description of Exterior:

1. Floor plan: A small vestibule leads into an approximately 24' x 48' worship area with an elevated altar at the east end of the room. To the left of the altar is a narrow hallway providing access to the sacristy, 16' x 35'. A door in the southwest corner opens onto a staircase leading down to a half basement. Rear exit doors are on the northwest and east sides of the sacristy.
2. Stairways: A stairway of dimensional lumber is off the sacristy, providing access to the basement.

3. Flooring: Six-inch hardwood flooring is found throughout. The floor is presently covered with rust and beige, vine pattern, wall-to-wall carpeting in the main area. It appears the sacristy also had carpeting but it has since been removed (as a result of salvage efforts).
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The wall and ceiling cover throughout the church is of painted plaster walls contrasted by dark stained and varnished woodwork details. Beaded tongue-and-groove wainscoting and ceiling cover is found in all three rooms (vestibule, worship room and sacristy).

Dark stained gothic-like panels stand approximately 7-8' high and 3' from the two side walls creating a more focused sanctuary space. These panels also serve to create the narrow access hallway to the sanctuary on the left as well as the right (although access is only through the sacristy). The panels are composed of long narrow projected arches approximately eight inches apart. A heavy drip molding above is capped with a pointed arch battlement-like ornament.

The hipped sacristy ceiling is covered with tongue-and-groove woodwork creating an almost hood effect. A dividing arch extending approximately one foot from the ceiling and slightly off center running east and west is braced just below the roofline with carved wooden brackets, a wooden keystone detail completes the arch. The arch is located at the point of the earlier addition to the sacristy.

5. Doorways and doors: Swinging double doors lead from the vestibule to the nave. The interior side of each door is covered with felt for acoustical purposes.
6. Decorative features and trim: The most outstanding decorative features in the church are the arched stained glass windows with fixed upper panes and operable lower sash panes. Only two different patterns are used with one varying patterned window found in the center of the triple arched window on the front facade. The lower operable portions of the windows have all been removed and the pattern is unknown at this time. The fixed panes are divided into two sections with generally a diamond pattern below and a floral pattern above. The windows are inset and surrounded by dark woodwork pieces provide a notable decorative element surrounding the stained glazing.

A small oak pedal pumped organ with simple decorative floral carvings stands to the right of the altar. This organ was made by Reason and Hamlin.

A simple latin cross hangs in the east wall over the altar. The altar itself is solid oak inscribed with latin symbols in simple paneling.

A bronze plaque over the doorway in the vestibule is inscribed as follows:

ST. PAUL'S RECTORY  
THIS BUILDING IS GIVEN TO THE  
DIOCESE OF NEBRASKA  
FOR THE USE OF THE RECTOR OF  
ST. PAUL'S PARISH, NIOBRARA  
BY MARY GERTRUDE EDSON ALDRICH  
IN MEMORY OF THE SISTERS AND  
BROTHER OF HER MOTHER  
MARGARET BONESTEEL EDSON  
MARY G. PERRY, KATE B. CONKLIN  
FANNY A. BONESTEEL AND HENRY E. BONESTEEL  
1918

This plaque was in the rectory donated by the Bonesteel family. The building was torn down in the late 1970s and the plaque was transferred to the church at this time.

A varnished wood corner cupboard stands in the southwest corner in the sacristy area. The top of the cupboard has a battlement detail which ornaments the mentioned altar panels.

A bell is said to be still in the tower, but it is not accessible.

7. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: Coal or wood burning furnace provide hot air heat, which is circulated through floor registers.
- b. Lighting: The church has eight modern suspended incandescent fixtures. Numerous old gaslight fixture hookups still remain.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church sits on a fifty foot corner lot with the front entrance oriented toward the southeast corner of Fourth Avenue and Maple Street.
2. Outbuildings: A rectory to the south of the church on Fourth Avenue was torn down in the late 1970s. An outhouse once stood in the southeast corner of the yard.

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Architect  
Historic American Buildings  
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Summer 1977  
and  
Kathryn Burns  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1977

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Niobrara project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in co-operation with the citizens of the Village of Niobrara. The project was funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District, in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of the Gavins Point Dam and Lewis and Clark Lake. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, the project was completed in the HABS Field Office in Niobrara, Nebraska during the summer of 1977 by project supervisor Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania), project historian Kathryn A. Burns (George Washington University), team foreman Larry Jones (Texas Tech University) and student architects Peter Darlow (McGill University), Lisa Becker (Notre Dame University) and Darl Rastorfer (University of Pennsylvania). The written historical and architectural data was prepared by Kathryn Burns, and edited by Susan McCown, a historian in the HABS office in August 1979. Two exterior photos were taken by Sam Amato in the fall of 1977.